

The Parable of the Ten Virgins.

23

I N A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D before
Her ROYAL HIGHNESS
T H E
Princess ANNE of Denmark,
A T
Tunbridge-Wells, Sept. 2. 1688.

MATTH. XXV. 1, 2, &c.

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.

By JOHN late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.

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And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.

MY design at present is to explain this *Parable*, and to make such Observations upon it, as seem most naturally and without squeezing the *Parable*, to spring from it: And then to make some Application of it to our selves.

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins; By the *Kingdom of Heaven* is meant the state and condition of things under the Gospel; By the *ten Virgins*, those who embraced the Profession of it, which is here represented by their *taking their Lamps and going forth to meet the Bridegroom*; in allusion to the ancient Custom of Marriages, in which the Bridegroom was wont to lead hom his Bride in the Night by the light of Lamps or Torches.

But this Profession was not in all equally firm and fruitful; and therefore those who persever'd and continued steadfast in this Profession, notwithstanding all the temptations and allurements of the World, and all the fierce storms and assaults of Persecution to which this Profession was exposed; and being thus firmly rooted in it, did bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and abound in the Graces and Virtues of a good Life; These are the *wise Virgins*: But those who either deserted this Profession, or did not bring forth fruits answerable to it, are the *foolish Virgins*.

And that this is the true difference between them will appear, if we consider how the *Parable* represents them,

them, verse 3, 4. *They that were foolish took their Lamps, and took no Oil with them: But the wise took Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps.* So that they both took their Lamps, and both lighted them, and therefore must both be supposed to have some Oil in their Lamps at first, as appears from verse 8. where *the foolish Virgins said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.* They had it seems some Oil in their Lamps at first, which kept them lighted for a little while, but had taken no care for a future supply. And therefore the difference between the wise and foolish Virgins did not, as some have imagin'd, consist in this, that the wise Virgins had Oil, but the foolish had none; but in this, that the foolish had taken no care for a further supply, after the Oil which was at first put into their Lamps was spent; as the wise had done, who besides the Oil that was in their Lamps carried likewise a Reserve in some other Vessel, for a continual supply of the Lamp, as there should be occasion; *the wise took Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps.*

Now the meaning of all this is, That they who are represented by the wise Virgins had not only embraced the Profession of the Christian Religion, as the foolish Virgins also had done, for they both had their Lamps lighted; but they likewise persever'd in that Profession, and brought forth fruits answerable to it. For by Oil in their Lamps and the first lighting of them, which was common to them both, is meant that solemn Profession of Faith and Repentance which all Christians make in Baptism: By that farther supply of Oil, which the wise Virgins only took care to provide, is signified our constancy and perseverance in this Profession, together with the fruits of the Spirit, and the improvement of the Grace received in Baptism by the practice and exercise of all the Graces and Virtues of a god Life, whereby Men are fitted and prepar'd for Death and Judgment, which are here represented to us by the *coming of the Bridegroom.*

This being plainly the main scope and intention of the Parable, I shall explain the rest of it, as there shall be occasion, under the several Observations which I shall raise from the several parts of it. And they shall be these.

First, I observe the charitable *Decorum* which our *B. Saviour* keeps in this as well as in the rest of his Parables; as if He would fain suppose and hope, that among those who enjoy the Gospel and make profession of it, the number of them that are truly good is equal to those that are bad. For our *B. Saviour* here represents the whole number of the Professors of Christianity by *ten Virgins*, the half whereof the *Parable* seems to suppose to be truly and really good, and to persevere in goodness to the end, verse 1, 2. *Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins, which took their Lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom: And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

Secondly, I observe how very common it is for Men to neglect this great concernment of their Souls, viz. a due preparation for another World; and how willing Men are to deceive themselves herein, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take pains to be really good and fit for Heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish Virgins, who had provided no supply of Oil in their Vessels, and when the Bridegroom was coming would have furnish'd themselves by *borrowing* or *buying* of others, *vers. 8, 9, 10.*

Thirdly, I observe, that even the better sort of Christians are not careful and watchful as they ought to prepare themselves for Death and Judgment: *Whilst the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*; even the wise Virgins as well as the foolish.

Fourthly, I observe further, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great Work of *Preparation*, when it is deferr'd and put off to the last:

Thus

Thus the foolish Virgins did, and what a sad confusion and hurry they were in we may see, *verse 6, 7, 8, 9.* And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold ! the Bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him. At midnight ; the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other : Then all those Virgins arose, and trimmed their Lamps : and the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your Oil, for our Lamps are gone out : But the wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you ; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your selves. And how ineffectual all that they could do at that time prov'd to be, we find *verse 10, 11, 12.* And whilst they went to buy the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other Virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us : But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Fifthly, I observe that there is no such thing as Works of Super-erogation ; That no Man can do more than needs, and is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another World. For when the foolish Virgins would have begg'd of the wise some Oil for their Lamps, the wise answered, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you. It was only the foolish Virgins that had entertain'd this foolish conceit, that there might be an over-plus of Grace and Merit in others sufficient to supply their want : But the wise knew not of any that they had to spare, but suppos'd all that they had little enough to qualifie them for the reward of eternal Life ; Not so, say they, *μὴ ποτε*, lest at any time, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should prove little enough for our selves.

Sixthly and lastly, I observe, That if we could suppose any persons to be so over-good, as to have more Grace and Goodness than needs to qualifie them for the Reward of eternal Life, yet there is no assigning and transferring of this over-plus of Grace and Virtue from one Man to another. For we see, *verse 9, 10.*

that all the ways which they could think of, of borrowing or buying Oil of others, did all prove ineffectual ; because the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one Sinner should be in a condition to merit for another.

All these *Observations* seem to have some fair and probable Foundation in some part or other of this *Parable* ; and most of them, I am sure, are agreeable to the main scope and intention of the whole. I shall speak to them severally, and as briefly as I can.

I. *First*, I observe the charitable *Decorum* which our *B. Saviour* keeps in this, as well as in the rest of his *Parables* ; as if he would fain suppose and hope, that among those who enjoy the Gospel and make Profession of it, the number of those who make a firm and sincere Profession of it, and persevere in goodness to the end, is equal to the number of those who do not make good their Profession, or who fall off from it.

I shall not be long upon this, because I lay the least stress upon it, of all the rest. I shall only take notice, that our *B. Saviour* in this *Parable* represents the whole number of the Professors of Christianity by *ten Virgins*, the half of which this *Parable* seems to suppose to have sincerely embraced the *Christian Profession*, and to have persever'd therein to the last ; *The Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened unto ten Virgins, which took their Lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom : And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

And this *Decorum* our *B. Saviour* seems carefully to observe in his other *Parables* : As in the *Parable of the Prodigal*, *Luke xv.* where for one Son that left his Father, and took riotous courses, there was another that staid always with him, and continued constant to his Duty. And in the *Parable of the ten Talents*, which immediately follows that of the *ten Virgins*, two are supposed to improve the Talents committed to them, for one that made no improvement of his. He that had *five Talents* committed to him made them five more, and he that had to gained other two ; and only he that had but one Talent, hid it in the Earth, and made no improvement of it. And in the *Parable* which I am now upon, the number of the Professors of Christianity, who took care to fit and prepare themselves for the coming of the Bridegroom, is supposed equal to the number of those who did not.

And whether this be particularly intended in the *Parable* or not, it may however be thus far instructive to us, That we should be so far from lessening the number of true Christians, and from confining the Church of Christ within a narrow compass, so as to exclude out of its Communion the far greatest part of the Professors of Christianity ; that on the contrary, we should enlarge the Kingdom of Christ as much as we can, and extend our Charity to all Churches and Christians, of what Denomination soever, as far as regard to Truth and to the foundations of the Christian Religion will permit us to believe and hope well of them ; and rather be contented to err a little on the favourable and charitable part, than to be mistaken on the censorious and damning side.

And

And for this reason perhaps it is, that our B. Saviour thought fit to frame his Parables with so remarkable a *Byass* to the charitable side: Partly to instruct us to extend our charity towards all *Christian Churches*, and *Professors* of the *Christian Religion*, and our good hopes concerning them, as far as with reason we can: And partly to reprove the uncharitableness of the *Jews*, who positively excluded all the rest of Mankind besides themselves, from all hopes of Salvation. An odious temper, which to the infinite Scandal of the Christian Name and Profession, hath prevail'd upon some *Christians* to that notorious degree, as not only to shut out all the Reform'd part of the *Western Church*, almost equal in number to themselves, from all hopes of Salvation under the notion of *Hereticks*; but likewise to un-church all the other Churches of the *Christian World*, which are of much greater extent and number than themselves, that do not own subjection to the *Bishop of Rome*: And this they do, by declaring it to be of necessity to Salvation for every Creature to be subject to the *Roman Bishop*. And this Supremacy of the *Bishop of Rome* over all *Christian Churches* *Bellarmin* calls the *Sum of the Christian Religion*. So that the *Roman Communion* is plainly founded in *Schism*, that is, in the most unchristian and uncharitable Principle that can be, namely, that they are the only true Church of Christ, out of which none can be saved: which was the very Schism of the *Donatists*. And in this they are so positive, that the Learned Men of that Church, in their Disputes and Writings, are much more inclinable to believe the Salvation of *Heathens* to be possible, than of any of those *Christians* whom they are pleased to call *Hereticks*. The Faith of the Church of Rome is certainly none of the best; but of one of the greatest and most essential Vertues of the Christian Religion, I mean Charity, I doubt they have the least share of any Christian Church this day in the World.

II. Secondly, I observe, not from any particular Circumstance, but from the main Scope and Design of this Parable, How very apt a great part of *Christians* are to neglect this great concernment of their Souls, viz. a careful and due preparation for another World; and how willing they are to deceive themselves in this matter, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take the pains to be really good and fit for Heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish Virgins, who had provided no supply of Oil in their Vessels, and when the Bridegroom was coming would have furnish'd themselves by borrowing or buying of others, *vers.* 8, 9, 10. They contented themselves with having their Lamps lighted at their first setting out to meet the Bridegroom, that is, with their being admitted into the Profession of Christianity by Baptism, but either were not stedfast in this Profession, or were not careful to adorn it with the *Graces* and *Vertues* of a good Life.

And the true Reason why Men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and are so hardly brought to those things wherein Religion mainly consists, I mean the Fruits of the Spirit and the practice of real

Goodness; I say, the true reason of this is, because they are extremely desirous to reconcile, if it were possible, the hopes of eternal Happiness in another World, with a liberty to live as they list in this present World: They are loth to be at the trouble and drudgery of mortifying their Lusts, and governing their Passions, and bridling their Tongues, and practising all those Duties which are comprehended in those *two great Commandments* of the *Love of God* and of our *Neighbour*: They would fain gain the favour of God, and make their calling and election sure, by some easier way than by giving all diligence to add to their *Faith* and *Knowledge* the *Graces* and *Vertues* of a good Life.

For the plain truth of the matter is, Men had rather that Religion should be any thing than what indeed it is, *viz.* the thwarting and crossing of their vicious Inclinations, the curing of their evil and corrupt Affections, the due care and government of their unruly Appetites and Passions, the sincere endeavour and the constant practice of all holiness and virtue in their lives: And therefore they had much rather have something that might handsomely palliate and excuse their evil inclinations and practices, than to be obliged to retrench and renounce them; and rather than amend and reform their wicked Lives, they would be contented to make an honourable amends and compensation to Almighty God in some other way.

This hath been the way and folly of Mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and design of Religion, and to thrust it by, by substituting something else in the place of it which, as they think, may serve the turn as well, having the appearance of as much devotion and respect towards God, and really costing them more money and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impose upon themselves, and to please themselves with a conceit of pleasing God full as well, or better, by some other way than that which he hath prescribed and appointed for them.

By this means, and upon this false Principle, Religion hath ever been apt to degenerate both among *Jews* and *Christians*, into external and little observances, and into a great zeal for lesser things with a total neglect of the greater and weightier matters of Religion; and, in a word, into infinite Superstitions of one kind or other, and an arrogant conceit of the extraordinary righteousness and merit of these things: In which some have proceeded to that height, as if they could drive a strict bargain with God for eternal Life and Happiness; and have treated him in so insolent a manner, by their Doctrine of the Merit of their Devotions and good Works, as if God were as much beholden to them for their service and obedience, as they are to Him for the reward of them; which they are not afraid to say they may challenge at God's hands as of right and justice belonging to them.

Nay, so far have they carried this Doctrine in the Church of *Rome*, as not only to pretend to merit eternal Life for themselves, but likewise to do a great deal more for the benefit and advantage of others who have not righte-

righteousness and goodness enough of their own : Which was the silly conceit of the foolish Virgins here in the Parable, as I shall have occasion to shew more fully by and by.

And it is no great wonder that such easie ways of Religion and pleasing God, are very grateful to the corrupt nature of Man, and that Men who are resolv'd to continue in an evil course are glad to be of a Church which will assure Salvation to Men upon such terms : The great difficulty is, for Men to believe that things which are so apparently absurd and unreasonable can be true ; and to persuade themselves that they can impose upon God by such pretences of service and obedience, as no wise Prince or Father upon Earth is to be deluded withal by his *Subjects* or *Children*. We ought to have worthier thoughts of God, and to consider that he is a *great King*, and will be obey'd and observ'd by his Creatures *in his own way*, and make them happy upon his own terms : And that obedience to what he commands is better and more acceptable to him than any other Sacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands : And likewise, that he is infinitely wise and good ; and therefore that the *Laws*, which he hath given us to live by, are much more likely and certain means of our Happiness, than any *Inventions* and *Devices* of our own.

III. *Thirdly*, I observe that even the better and more considerate sort of *Christians* are not so careful and watchful as they ought to prepare themselves for Death and Judgment ; *whilst the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumber'd and slept*. Even the *Disciples* of our *Saviour*, whilst he was yet personally present with them, and after a particular charge given them from his own mouth, *Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation* ; yet did not keep that guard upon themselves as to *watch with him for one hour*. In many things, says St. James, *we offend all* ; even the best of us : And who is there that doth not, sometime or other, remit of his vigilancy and care, so as to give the Devil an advantage and to lie open to temptation, for want of a continual guard upon himself ? But then the difference between the wise and foolish Virgins was this, that tho' they both *slept*, yet the wise did not let their Lamps go out ; they neither quitted their Profession, nor did they extinguish it by a bad Life : And tho' when the *Bridegroom* came suddenly upon them, they were not so actually prepar'd to meet him by a continual vigilancy, yet they were habitually prepar'd by the good disposition of their minds, and a general course of a holy life : Their Lamps might burn dim for want of continual trimming, but they had Oil in their *Vessels* to supply their Lamps, which the foolish Virgins had taken no care to provide. But surely the greatest wisdom of all is to maintain a continual watchfulness, that so we may not be surpriz'd at the *coming of the Bridegroom*, and be in a confusion when Death or Judgment shall overtake us. And *blessed are those Servants*, and wise indeed, whose Lamps always burn bright, and whom the *Bridegroom* when he comes *shall find watching*, and in a fit posture and preparation to meet him.

IV. *Fourthly*, I observe likewise, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great work of *Preparation*, when it is deferr'd and put off to the last. And thus the foolish Virgins did, but what a sad confusion and hurry they were in at the sudden coming of the Bridegroom, when they were not only asleep, but when after they were awaken'd they found themselves altogether unprovided of that which was necessary to trim their Lamps, and to put them in a posture to meet the Bridegroom: When they wanted that which necessary at that very instant, but could not be provided in an instant: I say, what a tumult and confusion they were in, being thus surpriz'd, the *Parable* represents to us at large, *vers.* 6, 7, 8, 9. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold! the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those Virgins arose and trimmed their Lamps, that is, they went about it as well as they could; and the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your Oil, for our Lamps are gone out.*

At midnight there was a cry made, that is, at the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other; when they were fast asleep, and suddenly awaken'd in great terror; when they could not on the sudden recollect themselves, and consider what to do; when the summons was so very short, that they had neither time to consider what was fit to be done, nor time to do it in.

And such is the Case of those who put off their Repentance and Preparation for another World, till they are surpriz'd by Death or Judgment; for it comes all to one in the issue, which of them it be. The Parable indeed seems more particularly to point at our *Lord's coming to Judgment*, but the case is much the same as to those who are surpriz'd by sudden Death; such as gives them but little, or not sufficient time for so a great a worst: Because such as Death leaves them, Judgment will certainly find them.

And what a miserable confusion must they needs be in, who are thus surpriz'd either by the one or the other? How unfit should we be, if the *general Judgment* of the World should come upon us on the sudden, to meet that great Judge at his coming, if we have made no preparation for it before that time? What shall we then be able to do, in that great and universal Consternation, when the *Son of Man shall appear in the Clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory*; when the *Sun shall be darken'd, and the Moon turned into blood, and all the powers of Heaven shall be shaken*: When all Nature shall feel such violent pangs and convulsions, and the whole World shall be in a combustion flaming and cracking about our ears: When the *Heavens shall be shrivel'd up as a Scroll when it is roll'd together*, and the *Earth shall be toss'd from its Center, and every Mountain and Island shall be removed*? What thoughts can the wisest Men then have about them, in the midst of so much noise and terror? Or if they could have any, what time will there then be to put them in execution? when they shall see the *Angel, that standeth upon the Sea and upon the Earth, lifting up his hand to Heaven and swearing by him that liveth*

for ever and ever that Time shall be no longer; as this dreadful day is described Rev. x. 5, 6, and Chap. vi. 15. where Sinners are represented at the Appearance of this Great Judge, not as flying to God in hopes of mercy, but as flying from Him in utter despair of finding mercy with Him: *The Kings of the Earth, and the great Men, and the mighty Men, and the rich Men, and the great Captains hid themselves in the Dens and in the Rocks of the Earth; and said to the Mountains and Rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great Day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?* The biggest and the boldest Sinners that ever were upon Earth, shall then flee from the Face of Him whom they have so often blasphemed and denied; and shall so far despair of finding mercy with Him in that Day, who would sue to Him for it no sooner, that they shall address themselves to the Mountains and Rocks, as being more pitiful and exorable than He; *to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: From the wrath of the Lamb, to signify to us that nothing is more terrible than Meekness and Patience when they are thoroughly provok'd and turn'd into Fury.*

In such dreadful confusion shall all impenitent Sinners be, when they shall be surpriz'd by that *great and terrible Day of the Lord*: And the Case of a dying Sinner, who would take no care in the time of his Life and Health to make preparation for another World, is not much more hopeful and comfortable.

For alas! how little is it that a sick and dying Man can do in such a strait of time? in the midst of so much pain and weakness of Body, and of such confusion and amazement of Mind! With what heart can he set about so great a Work, for which there is so little time? With what face can he apply himself to God in this extremity, whom he hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his Life? And how can he have the confidence to hope, that God will hear his cries and regard his Tears that are forc'd from him in this day of his necessity? when he is conscious to himself that in that long day of God's Grace and Patience he turned a deaf ear to all his merciful invitations, and *rejected the counsell of God against himself*. In a word, how can he who *would not know, in that his Day, the things which belonged to his peace*, expect any other but that they should now be for ever *hid from his eyes*, which are ready to be clos'd in utter darkness?

I will not pronounce any thing concerning the impossibility of a *death-bed Repentance*: But I am sure that it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one Example, that I know of, in the whole Bible, of the Repentance of a dying Sinner; I mean that of the *penitent Thief* upon the Cross: And the circumstances of his Case are so peculiar and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope and encouragement to Men in ordinary Cases. We are not like to suffer in the company of the Son of God, and of the Saviour of the World; and if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave our selves towards Him so well as the *penitent Thief* did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a Life,

And

And the Parable in the Text is so far from giving any encouragement to a Death-bed Repentance and Preparation, that it rather represents their Case as desperate who put off their Preparation to that time. How ineffectual all that the foolish Virgins could do at that time did in the conclusion prove, is set forth to us at large in the Parable; *Verse 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.* They wanted Oil, but could neither borrow nor buy it: They would then fain have had it, and ran about to get it; but it was not to be obtained neither by entreaty, nor for money: First they apply themselves to the wise Virgins, for a share in the overplus of their *Graces and Virtues*; *Verse 8. The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your Oil, for our Lamps are gone out, but the wise answered, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:* The wise Virgins, it seems, knew of none they had to spare: And then they are represented as ironically sending the foolish Virgins to some famous Market where this Oil was pretended to be sold, *Verse 9. Go ye rather to them that sell and buy for your selves:* And as dying and desperate Persons are apt to catch at every twig, and when they can see no hopes of being saved, are apt to believe every one that will give them any; so these foolish Virgins follow the advice, *Ver. 10. And whilst they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut; and afterwards came also the other Virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

You see how little, or rather no encouragement at all there is from any the least circumstance in this Parable, for those who have delay'd their Preparation for another World till they be overtaken by Death or Judgment, to hope by any thing that they can then do, by any importunity which they can then use, to gain admission into Heaven. Let those consider this with fear and trembling, who forget God and neglect Religion all their Life time, and yet feed themselves with vain hopes by some Device or other to be admitted into Heaven at last.

V. Fifthly, I observe that there is no such thing as *Works of Super-erogation*, that is, that no Man can do more than needs, and than is his duty to do, by way of Preparation for another World. *Ver. 8, 9.* For when the foolish Virgins would have begg'd of the wise some Oil for their Lamps, the wise answered, *Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:* It was only the foolish Virgins that in the time of their extremity, and when they were conscious that they wanted that which was absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into Heaven, who had entertain'd this idle Conceit that there might be an overplus of Grace and Merit in others sufficient to supply their want: But the wise knew not of any they had to spare, but supposed all that they had done, or could possibly do, to be little enough to qualify them for the glorious Reward of eternal Life: *No so,* say they, *μὴ ποτε* left at any time, that is, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should be little enough for our selves: And in this Point they had been plainly instructed by the Bridegroom himself, *But ye, when ye have done all, say we are unprofitable.*

unprofitable servants, and have done nothing but what was our duty to do.

And yet this Conceit of the foolish Virgins, as absurd as it is, hath been taken up in good earnest by a grave Matron, who gives out her self to be the *Mother and Mistress of all Churches*, and *the only infallible Oracle of Truth*, I mean the Church of *Rome*, whose avowed Doctrine it is, that there are some Persons so excellently good that they may do more than needs for their own Salvation: And therefore when they have done as much for themselves as in strict duty they are bound to do, and thereby have paid down a full and valuable consideration for Heaven, and as much as in equal justice between God and Man it is worth; that then they may go to work again for their Friends, and begin a new Score; and from that time forwards may put the Surplusage of their good Works as a Debt upon God; to be laid up in the publick Treasury of the Church, as so many Bills of Credit which the *Pope* by his Pardons and Indulgences may dispense, and place to whose account he pleases: And out of this Bank, which is kept at *Rome*, those who never took care to have any Righteousness of their own may be supplied at reasonable Rates.

To which they have added a further supply of Grace, if there should be any need of it, by the *Sacrament of extreme Unction*, never heard of in the Christian Church for many Ages; but devised, as it were on purpose, to furnish such *foolish Virgins* with Oil as are here described in the Parable.

And thus by one Device or other they have enervated the Christian Religion to that degree, that it hath almost quite lost its true virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of Men: And, instead of the real Fruits of *Goodness* and *Righteousness*, it produceth little else but *Superstition* and *Folly*; or if it produce any real Virtues, yet even the virtue of those Virtues is in a great measure spoil'd by their arrogant pretences of *Merit* and *Super-erogation*, and is render'd insignificant to themselves by their insolent carriage and behaviour towards God.

VI. *Sixthly and lastly*, If we could suppose any Persons to be so overgrown with Goodness, as to have more than needs to qualify them for the Reward of eternal Life; yet there can be no assigning and transferring of this overplus of *Grace* and *Virtue* from one Man to another. For we see that all the ways that could be thought on of begging, or borrowing, or buying Oil of others, did all prove ineffectual; because the thing is in its own Nature impracticable, that one Sinner who owes all that he hath, and much more to God, should have any thing to spare wherewithal to merit for another.

Indeed our B. Saviour hath merited for us all the Reward of eternal Life, upon the Conditions of Faith and Repentance and Obedience: But the infinite Merit of his Obedience and Sufferings will be of no benefit and advantage to us, if we our selves be not really and inherently righteous. So St. *John* tells us, and warns us to beware of the contrary Conceit, *Little Children, let no Man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.*

If we do sincerely endeavour to please God and keep his commandments in the general course of a holy and virtuous Life, the Merit of Christ's perfect Obedience and Sufferings will be available with God for the acceptance of our sincere though but imperfect Obedience. But if we take no care to be righteous and good our selves, the perfect Righteousness of Christ will do us no good; much less the imperfect Righteousness of any other Man who is a Sinner himself. And the holiest Man that ever was upon Earth can no more assign and make over his Righteousness, or Repentance, or any part of either, to another that wants it, than a Man can bequeath his *Wisdom* and *Learning* to his Heir, or his Friend: No more than a sick Man can be restor'd to Health by virtue of the *Physick* which another Man hath taken.

Let no Man therefore think of being good by a Deputy, that cannot be contented to be happy and to be saved the same way, that is, to go to *Hell* and to be Tormented there in Person, and to go to *Heaven* and be admitted into that *Place of Blise* only by *Proxy*. So that these *good Works* with a *hard name*, and the making over the Merit of them to others, have no manner of foundation either in Scripture or Reason, but are all mere Fancy and Fiction in Divinity.

The Inference from all this shall be the Application which our *Saviour* makes of this *Parable*, *Ver. 13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*; as if he had said, the design of this *Parable* is to instruct us that we ought to be continually vigilant, and always upon our guard, and in a constant readiness and preparation to meet the *Bridegroom*; because we know not the time of his coming to Judgment, nor yet, which will be of the same consequence and concernment to us, do any of us know the precise time of our own Death. Either of these may happen at any time, and come when we least expect them. And therefore we should make the best and speediest Provision that we can for another World, and should be continually upon our watch, and trimming our Lamps, that we may not be surprized by either of these; neither by our own particular *Death*, nor by the general Judgment of the World: *Because the Son of Man will come in a Day when we look not for Him, and at an hour when we are not aware.*

More particularly, we should take up a present and effectual resolution not to delay our *Repentance*, and the Reformation of our Lives, that we may not have that great Work to do when we are not fit to do any thing; nor to dispose of our temporal Concernments, much less to prepare for *Eternity*, and to do that in a few moments which ought to have been the care and endeavour of our whole Lives: That we may not be forced to huddle up an imperfect, and I fear an insignificant *Repentance*; and to do that in great haste and confusion, which certainly does require our wisest and most deliberate Thoughts, and all the Consideration in the World.

And

And we should provide store of Oil in our Vessels, wherewith to supply our Lamps, that they may burn bright to the last; I mean, we should improve the Grace which we received in *Baptism*, by abounding in the fruits of the Spirit and in all the substantial Virtues of a good Life; that so *an entrance may be ministred to us abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

By this means, when we are called to meet the Bridegroom, we shall not be put to those miserable and sharking shifts which the foolish Virgins were driven to, of begging, or borrowing, or buying Oil; which will all fail us, when we come to depend upon them: And though the dying Man may make a hard shift to support himself with these false Comforts for a little while, yet when the short Delusion is over, which will be as soon as ever he is stepp'd into the other World, he will to his everlasting confusion and trouble find the door of Heaven shut against him, and that notwithstanding all his vast Treasure of Pardons and Indulgences, which have cost him so much and are worth so little, he shall never see the Kingdom of God.

And *lastly*, we should take great care that we do not extinguish our Lamps by quitting the Profession of our Holy Religion upon any temptation of advantage, or for fear of any loss or suffering whatsoever. This Occasion will call for all our Faith and Patience, all our Courage and Constancy,

Nunc animis opus, Anea, nunc pectore firmo.

When it comes to this Trial, we had need to gird up the loins of our minds, to summon all our forces, and to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand fast in an evil day, and when we have done all to stand.

And now, my Brethren, to use the Words of St. Peter, 1 Pet. v. 12. *I testifie unto you, that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand.* The Protestant Reformed Religion,

ligion, which we in this Nation profess, is the very Gospel of Christ, the true ancient Christianity.

And, for God's sake, since in this *hour of Temptation*, when our Religion is in so apparent hazard, we pretend to love it to that degree as to be contented to part with any thing for it, let us resolve to practise it; and to testify our love to it in the same way that our Saviour would have us shew our love to Him, by keeping his *Commandments*.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's Exhortation, so very proper for this purpose, and to this present Time, *Phil. 1. 27. Only let your Conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ*, that is, chiefly and above all take care to lead lives suitable to the Christian Religion: And then, as it follows, *Stand fast in one Spirit, with one Mind, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel: And in nothing terrified by your Adversaries, which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of Salvation, and that of God.*

“ Now unto Him that is able to stablish you in the
 “ Gospel, and to keep you from falling; and to pre-
 “ sent you faultless before the presence of his Glory
 “ with exceeding joy: To the only wise God our Sa-
 “ viour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power,
 “ both now and ever. *Amen.*

FINIS.